

GEORGIA FORESTRY
COMMISSION



Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program

Standards for Forest Stewardship Plans & Renewals

INTRODUCTION

Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program began in 1990 as part of a larger national effort to better educate non-industrial private forest landowners in multiple-use or stewardship management of their land and resources.

The program utilizes the unprecedented cooperation of resource professionals from both the public and private sector with backgrounds in forestry, wildlife biology, soil science, and recreation management. Working together, they produce detailed and comprehensive management plans called Forest Stewardship Plans for landowners enrolled in the program.

Landowners who have been enrolled in the program for 10 years or more are due for a plan renewal. Also, any landowner who has acquired property from the original plan owners or who has a change in plan objectives is eligible for a renewal plan. This handout gives specifications for new as well as renewal plans so that participating resource professionals understand what is required under the Forest Stewardship Program. Once completed, all plans are reviewed to assure consistency and high standards throughout the program. Please submit the plan, along with a copy of the landowner's application, to your local District Stewardship Forester.

The program also seeks to recognize landowners who adopt their plans and do an outstanding job of managing their forest resources. A set of guidelines was developed to assess the landowner's land management accomplishments and determine eligibility for Certified Forest Steward designation. Certified Forest Stewards are recognized locally for their accomplishments and given a property sign signifying their achievements. **Any landowner wishing to re-enroll in the program and receive a new plan must either be certified as a steward or apply for a waiver from the state program coordinator before a plan renewal will be approved.**

Participants in the Forest Stewardship Program who already have an original plan may exempt certain plan requirements according to the following renewal guidelines.

- **Type 1-** If the landowner seeking a plan renewal has the original written plan, the landowner objectives have not changed, and the ownership has not changed, then a renewal plan may need only consist of a new detailed stand map and aerial photo, a new detailed stand description and set of recommendations including any special natural areas, and a new detailed summary page of recommended actions. All other components should remain the same and thus not need repeating. This is considered a Type I renewal plan.
- **Type 2-** If the landowner seeking a plan renewal does not have a copy of the original plan, or has otherwise had a change in ownership or objectives, then the renewal plan must contain the entire required plan components listed below. This is considered a Type II renewal plan.

SHAPE FILES

Every forest Stewardship plan must have an associated shape file created for the plan. Acceptable format for the shape file(s) is ArcGIS with the associated files (.shp, .shx, .dbf, .prj, .sbx, .sbn, .xml) For more information on shape file requirements, consult your local stewardship forester.

COVER LETTER

- Identify the landowner as a participant in Georgia's Forest Stewardship Program and congratulate him on his intent to practice multiple-use forestry.
- Specify that the management plan covers a ten-year period.
- Refer to the possibility that the landowner may be designated as a *Certified Forest Steward* and duly recognized at some point in the future when significant progress has been made in implementing the plan.
- All plans must be reviewed and signed by the GFC district stewardship forester. Give the name, signature, phone number, affiliation and position of the plan author.

LANDOWNER OBJECTIVES

- Specify the landowner's primary and secondary management objectives clearly. These must reflect the landowner's interests as detailed on his/her application for participation in the program.
- All landowner objectives should consider the overall program goals of soil conservation, water quality protection, and biodiversity enhancement.
- In order of landowner interest, briefly mention each forest resource (timber, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetics) indicating how their management will be integrated.

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH/STAND MAP

- All plans should include a camera or digital reproduction and enlargement of an aerial photo or ArcGis map of the property including a legend showing the landowner name, county, and correct map scale.
- A designation of magnetic north should be drawn on the photo, and all property lines plainly marked.
- The division of stands on the photo should have the same numbering scheme as the stand descriptions in the plan along with acreages.
- All marking and lettering should be neat in appearance.

GENERAL MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- General recommendations are optional but should be provided when appropriate. A list of possible recommendations is included in the appendix.

SPECIFIC STAND DESCRIPTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Delineate and identify each stand type on the aerial photograph.
- Special Natural Areas (if present) should be treated as individual stand types, delineated, and numbered on the aerial photograph.
- Each stand should be fully described so that the landowner knows what he has and what the current condition is. Stand information should include (to the extent possible) stand origin, age, overstory species composition, basal area per acre, and understory condition.
- The extent to which a particular resource is described should relate to the landowners interest in that resource, but should include the desired future condition. See below.
- The following should be addressed in the description section:
 - **Timber resource.** If timber management is a primary or secondary interest of the landowner, then a thorough description of the timber should be included. Proprietary information such as volumes and value may be added at the discretion of the forester. This information should be presented in a form that is both understandable and useful to the landowner. Tables should only be used when there is a clear reason for doing so.
 - **Wildlife resource.** If wildlife management is a primary or secondary interest of the landowner, then information on the habitat and conditions of target populations should be given.
 - **Soil & water resources.** Any critical soil conditions occurring within this stand should be fully described. A general description of the soil (including a measure of productivity) may be given if it is pertinent to the anticipated management recommendations. Describe water resources with comments on water quality. When wetland conditions are present or likely, report it by stand or stand type.

- **Recreation resources.** Existing recreation use in the stand should be detailed, if applicable. Potential resource use and development should be covered as well. When this is a primary or secondary objective of the landowner, considerable detail is expected here.
 - **Aesthetics resource.** Comment on the aesthetic appeal of the stand, but tread lightly (remembering that beauty is often in the eye of the beholder!). Any eyesores should be detailed here. When this is a primary or secondary objective of the landowner, considerable detail is expected here.
- Recommendations for each stand should immediately follow the description for that stand (before the next stand is described).
 - Recommendations should address multiple use management as indicated by the landowner's choice of objectives and not focus on only a single resource
 - Recommendations should offer specific management details for both water quality and forest health considerations. Specific recommendations from BMP manual should be integrated where necessary under each stand type.
 - Recommendations should be explained in layman's terms, be concise and easy to understand and should document a feasible strategy and timetable for practice implementation.

RESOURCE ELEMENTS

The plan preparer will consider, describe and evaluate resource elements present and their importance to the ownership. Resource elements to be considered include:

- Soil and Water
- Biological diversity
- Aesthetic quality
- Recreation
- Timber
- Fish and wildlife
- Threatened and endangered species
- Forest health
- Archeological, cultural and historic sites
- Wetlands
- Fire
- Carbon cycle

Management recommendations and alternative strategies, consistent with landowner objectives, will be provided to protect or enhance all resource elements that are present. The professional resource manager will discuss the Forest Stewardship Management Plan with the landowner, following completion, and periodically, to assure understanding and encourage plan implementation.

SUMMARY OF ACTION ITEMS

- Each plan should contain a summary list of recommended actions and include year of treatment and any other pertinent information.
- Any action items that include future GFC service delivery should be forwarded to the appropriate supervisor for that service.

APPENDIX ITEMS (Optional)

- Glossary: a glossary of forestry terms is helpful to most landowners.
- Sources of assistance: A list of vendors, consultants, government agencies and programs, timber buyers, etc. is very helpful to landowners.
- Literature: Any literature referenced in the plan which covers recommended practices and management techniques should be included for the landowner to study as he wishes. This will allow the forester to write a more streamlined plan by leaving out long explanations. Hub articles and fact sheets can provide detailed information.

ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

List appropriate sources of assistance and services available including contact person's name, phone number, and address.

- Suggestions include:
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- Farm Services Agency
- DNR Game Management
- GFC
- Cooperative Extension Service
- Consulting Foresters & Wildlife Biologists
- Industry landowner assistance programs
- Vendors
- Suppliers

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Some potential general management recommendations may include:

- All land management practices should seek to mitigate the impact on the soil and water resource as well as conserve and enhance native biodiversity.
- Establish, mark, and maintain the property boundaries. For liability purposes, posted signs should be used. Try to avoid placing these signs on trees especially those with timber value. If trees must be used, aluminum nails should be used to secure the signs.

- Firebreaks should be installed around all pine stands and a prescribed burning regime established. A prescribed burn should be used on a 1-5 year rotation to reduce fuel buildup, control unwanted hardwoods, and promote early successional habitat. Break stand into 15-40ac compartments to better facilitate management. Most burns should be conducted in late winter or early spring; however, summer burns may be used as a hardwood control method. The burn should be done under very specific weather conditions. The Georgia Forestry Commission or a consulting forester can assist you with this operation.
- Conduct periodic thinning to maintain at least 30% of ground in direct sunlight. A residual basal area of 65-75 ft²/ac is a good compromise between timber production and wildlife management. Evenly scatter slash from thinning throughout, and remember to retain 4-6 hardwood snags/acre where possible. Thinning more heavily within (30-120ft) stand edge along roads, firebreaks, and openings provides better access, improves fire protection, and promotes transitional habitat for wildlife.
- Retain mast-producing hardwoods during thinning in groups or stands. Oaks should comprise ½ of remaining trees with rest being a variety of soft-mast producers. Discourage conversion of existing hardwoods (e.g., oak, hickory, cypress) unless recommended by professional.
- Removal of cull or inferior trees for firewood is encouraged. Release of good, mast bearing trees (acorn, nut, and fruit producers) can be attained by removing any lesser valued trees that are crowding them. The oaks and yellow poplars will have a higher value than a sweetgum. When harvesting trees for firewood, protect all snags 12' diameter at breast height (4.5ft above the ground) or greater for use by cavity-dependent wildlife species.
- Establish and maintain Streamside Management Zones (SMZ) following "Recommended Best Management Practices for Forestry in Georgia"; however, most wildlife benefits from wider (100-300ft) SMZ's along creeks, lake sites, and other drainages. Vehicle and heavy equipment use should be restricted within the SMZ.
- When creating any new woods roads, the guidelines set forth in "Recommended Best Management Practices for Forestry in Georgia" should be followed. Water control structures, such as water bars, water turnouts, and broad-based dips, should be installed on all woods roads where needed to prevent erosion. Any new permanent woods roads, openings, or log decks should be seeded with recommended vegetation to limit erosion and create suitable wildlife habitat.. All erosion control methods used should conform to USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service standards.
- On properties where game management is emphasized, strive for 5-20% of the property to be in wildlife openings. Loading decks, powerline right-of-ways, adjacent roadways, firebreaks, agricultural fields, and fallow areas can be used as wildlife openings. Manage for native forages by prescribed burning, winter disking, or planting 30-50% of opening on a 1-3 year rotation. A soil sample is beneficial to determine lime and fertilizer needs. More information for game management practices can be found at <http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us>, click *hunting*.

PLAN CRITERIA CHECK LIST

For (landowner or farm name) _____

1. Landowner Objective: Landowner objectives have been clearly stated?

Yes___ No___

2. Plan was prepared with or verified as meeting the minimum standards of a Forest Stewardship Management Plan by a professional resource manager and authorship is documented?

Yes___ No___

3. Plan describes current forest condition or condition class of the property? Plan describes desired forest condition or condition class, and includes practices and activities aimed at reaching the desired forest condition or condition class?

Yes___ No___

4. Plan documents a feasible management strategy and timeline for implementing conservation practices over a 10 year period. Recommendations are site specific and will protect or enhance all resource elements that are present?

Yes___ No___

5. Plan describes any suggested monitoring activities to be done by the forester, other natural resource professional, or landowner?

Yes___ No___

6. The plan preparer has considered, described and evaluated resource elements present and their importance to the ownership. Resource elements to be considered may include: Soil and water, biological diversity, aesthetic quality, recreation, timber, fish and wildlife, threatened and endangered species, forest health, archeological, cultural and historic sites, wetlands, and fire.

Yes___ No___

7. The landowner's understanding may be improved by including additional information appendices. Appendices might include: Descriptions of assistance available and incentive programs, educational materials, a glossary of terms, an explanation of applicable federal, state and/or county regulatory programs, especially as they apply to: archeological, cultural and historical sites, wetlands and threatened and endangered species. Appropriate appendices included?

Yes___ No___

8. Aerial Photograph and Shape file: These are required in all plans and obtainable through the Georgia Forestry Commission local office, but may be obtained from other sources. Photo and shape file included?

Yes___ No___

Plan writer _____

Date _____

(Note: this check sheet should be completed for each FSP and a copy should be uploaded into the stewardship database as a part of the plan.)